A Beast-Filled Park Eyed Near Bowie
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Texas multimillionaire H. Ross Perot and two animal trainers from Ireland want to open a drive-through park on 280 acres near Bowie and fill it with about 450 African animals, including elephants, lions and baboons.

According to the design, most animals would roam freely within the park and onto the 4-mile road meandering within it. Except for a few areas, visitors would be required to remain in their automobiles. The park would be enclosed by a 14-foot fence. Elephants would be separated from the road by a dry moat.

Perot and the animal trainers, brothers Frank and William Stephenson, have purchased an option on the Central Avenue (Rte. 214) tract, four miles west of Rte. 301 and about eight miles from the District line. They have applied for zoning approval, and if it is granted they plan to open the park by the end of this year.

The Stephensons, who formerly worked for the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, have owned and operated a similar animal park for three years in Northern Ireland, about 65 miles north of Belfast.

Frank Stephenson says 22 such parks are scattered around the world already, four in the United States. The first American park was opened five years ago near Palm Beach, Fla.

"Our goal," Stephenson said, "is to keep the park in an absolutely natural state, so that visitors can see the animals in their natural state."

The 280-acre tract, hilly and about 35 per cent wooded. The remainder is used for pasture and tobacco.

The park would be open approximately from April through November, Stephenson said. Admission prices have not been decided, he said, but expectations are that 1,000 cars would visit the park each day.

The park in Florida charges $2.95 for adults, and $1.50 for children aged four through 14, officials there said.

The Stephensons and Perot have formed a corporation, C. T. Industries, Inc. They would not say how the stock is distributed or how much money would be invested in the park, but sources close to the operation said Perot holds a majority of the stock.

Jack Sloan, an official with the Prince George's County planning board, said he recieved the corporation's application for the special zoning exception Dec. 22.

Sloan said the planning board's staff would write a report on the application, and then send it on to the board for action. Final approval would be required from the County Council.

The animal park is the second major recreational proposal to be announced for suburban Maryland this month. The Marriott Corp. is seeking approval for a Disneyland-type amusement park on an 850-acre complex near Columbia.

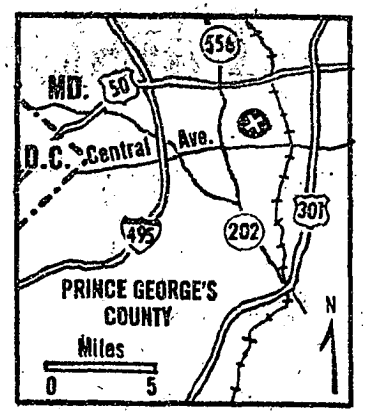
Marriott's plans include a 200-acre preserve with hundreds of animals from all over the world in natural habitats. At the Marriott park, guests would travel in glass-roofed trams to see the animals.

An aide to Perot said the Stephensons approached Perot in June with their idea to open a park somewhere on the East Coast, and ulitmately the choice was narrowed to the Washington area.

Perot, 41, is chairman and majority stockholder of Electronic Data Systems Corp., which he started with $1,000 in 1962. It is now a multimillion dollar operation. He gained national and international attention with attempts to free American prisoners of war in Vietnam.

"It's quite a lot of fun to see these two fellows (Frank and William Stephenson) put this together," Perot said in a telephone interview. "I didn't know them at all until they walked into my office with their idea. You know, when I was getting started in 1962, I had to go around and look for support, too.

"I'm convinced they have the ability to do this well. I'm just a guy standing there with a grease gun. I can lubricate their idea with financial encouragement," Perot said.



An "X" marks the spot of the proposed animal park approximately eight miles east of D.C.

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